

Spirit Rock

A Path of Healing: The Wisdom of the Somatic and Subtle Body

with Jill Satterfield

Sometimes healing begins not with words or insights, but with a few tender directed breaths, within the quiet awareness of what's happening in the body right now. A flicker of tightness in the chest. A contraction in the belly. A warmth in the heart. These sensations, often overlooked, are the first whispers of our inner life—***the place where stories begin and, if we listen kindly, where they can gently dissolve***. The body doesn't lie. It offers truth in the form of experience: sensations that are impermanent, impersonal, and profoundly alive in the present moment.

This is the somatic path—healing that starts with the body, not as an object to be fixed, but as a living field of intelligence and consciousness. **Sensations come before thoughts**. They signal the emotions beginning to rise and give us a moment of grace before those emotions harden into stories, beliefs, and patterns. When we ignore them, they crystallize into conditioning—automatic habits of body and mind. But when we learn to feel what's here with tenderness and curiosity, we reclaim choice. We interrupt the trance of reactivity. We remember who we really are or would like to become.

Alongside the somatic, there is another layer: **the subtle body**. Less about the muscles and bones and recognizable sensations, more about vibration, energy, and the more quiet undercurrents that also shape our moods, our posture, even our view of the world. In this inner terrain, the cognitive mind follows. The subtle always there, can also be sensed and if we are intuned. **Healing unfolds when we include the whole of our being—mental, emotional, physical, and energetic**. Awareness flows through the mind (Nama or mental form) just as it does in the body (*Rupa, material form*). The Buddha referred to both as Nama Rupa, the pair inherently connected, continually conversing and equally important when healing from what ails us.

Course Overview

This course invites you into the quiet intelligence of your own body—the somatic and subtle realms where true healing begins. Rather than managing symptoms at the surface, you'll learn to meet your inner experience often referred to as interoception, with presence and compassion. Through gentle, embodied practices, you'll soften fear, loosen the grip of self-criticism, and return to a grounded sense of ease from the inside out. This path of deep sensing and listening, responding to where the body whispers and knowing how the breath can guide. Healing unfolds not through effort, but through allowing and when needed, re-arranging. Whether you're on a personal journey or supporting others in theirs, you'll learn to trust the body's language and recognize how it's an integral aspect of awareness as a whole.

What is the Subtle Body—and Why It Matters for Deep Healing

Beneath the surface of muscles and bones and more obvious sensations, lies another dimension of experience: the subtle body. As an integral aspect of the somatic body, it's a deeper, quieter layer—an energetic landscape where emotion, memory, and potential live. The somatic and subtle body both express through the felt sense, sensations that exist just before words are formed and stories are created. As we become more fully embodied, we are attuned to the compendium of languages we speak - verbally and sometimes pictorially in the mind, emotionally in the heart, and through sensations and vibrations in the subtle body. Awareness exists in all expressions so we learn to notice not only the obvious signals—tightness, tension, restlessness—but also the quieter vibrations and intuitive messages that shape how we feel, move, and connect. These inner patterns, though invisible, are powerful. They shape our posture, our breath, our relationships, and even our worldview.

When we attune to these layers, we begin to sense how everything is connected. Just as breath can shift our nervous system, a softening in the physical and subtle body can open the heart. Emotions no longer need to harden into habits. Thoughts don't have to take over. Healing becomes possible—not by force, but by tuning in to what's already present and gently allowing or guiding it to shift.

This is the invitation of somatic and subtle body awareness: to sense more deeply, respond more kindly, and trust the wisdom that lives beneath the noise.

Moving In: the Somatic to the Subtle to the Agency of Healing

1. The Body is Where Patterns Begin—And Where They Can Be Gently Rewritten

Before fear becomes a story, before anger becomes a reaction, before pain turns to overwhelm—they begin as sensations. By sensing these early stirrings in the body, we gain the chance to respond with presence rather than habit. Habits of body, heart and mind are what prevent choice and spiritual growth. Not by pushing away discomfort, but by sensing their quiet stirrings as they begin and responding with care.

2. It's Where Dukkha Lives—And Where It Can Be Released

Clinging, aversion, and the tightening that comes with them show up first in the body. Initially as more recognizable sensations, and then as the subtle body's vibrations. Both help us recognize these patterns and not identify with them. When we catch them here—before they've crystallized into thoughts or behaviors—we can meet them with kindness and let them move through rather than take hold.

3. Healing Happens Through Re-Awareness, Not Fixing

Healing isn't about correcting what's wrong. It's about sensing and gently re-arranging our inner patterns—physically, mentally/emotionally, and energetically—so they serve love, clarity, and interconnection. This process begins with awareness, sensing the body, utilizes the breath to unify and unfolds with continued intention.

4. It Reconnects Us to Wholeness

Most of us live in what seem to be divergent paths —thinking one thing, feeling another, doing something else. The body invites us back into coherence. Through breath, imagination, and embodied awareness, we reunite body, heart, and mind. This inner harmony restores a felt sense of belonging: to ourselves, to each other, and to the world.

Course Sessions

Session 1: Regulating the Nervous System

The Ground of Spacious Awareness

Before deep healing is possible, we must feel settled and balanced enough to rest the heart/mind and be more open to what we are experiencing. This session introduces

foundational practices to calm the nervous system (part of the subtle system), increase capacity to be with our experiences, and gently reconnect with the body as a stable presence in the moment. Once more at ease, we can meet life as it is and allow experiences to move through rather than get caught, stuck and become a pattern that creates dis-ease.

You'll explore:

- Breath as both barometer, connector and medicine
- How to shift from reactivity to presence
- The link between breath, energy, emotions and thoughts
- Practices to create spaciousness and receptivity

Session 2: Mapping Sensation

Discover Your Unique Somatic Language

The body speaks a language before and beyond words. In this session, you'll learn to track sensation as a gateway to emotional insight and embodied awareness.

You'll explore:

- How to trace body patterns
- How thoughts and emotions show up as physical sensations
- How to track mental and emotional habits to sense where and how they begin in sensations
- Practices to reduce overthinking and identifying (or believing) with thoughts through embodied focus

Session 3: The Power of Imagination

Rewriting the Inner Script

Imagination is not escape—it's the nervous system and subtle body's native language of possibility. This session shows how visualization, breath, and embodied awareness are mirrors and how they can transform internal patterns.

You'll explore:

- How imagination shifts physiological and emotional states
- How to “recode” old emotional imprints through guided imagery
- Breath-visualization pairings for healing and resilience
- Creative practices that lead towards liberating the heart
- Deeply recognize interdependence and know you are an integral part of everything
- Experience how everyone has their own unique wiring, all are variations on a human theme

Session 4: The Medicine of Kindness

Soften, Open, Connect

Kindness isn’t just a mindset—it’s a somatic experience that softens tension, builds trust and is spaciousness embodied which restores connection. This session helps you cultivate kindness and compassion as felt senses, not concepts and cultivate the spaciousness to invite it in.

You’ll explore:

- How kindness shifts the body’s protective contractions
- Practices for internal softening and creating spaciousness to invite love in
- Emotional safety arriving as a process, when ready and at your own pace
- The embodied heart as a source of resilience, curiosity and ease
- How kindness turns into compassion that helps restore the parts of you left behind

Session 5: Integration for Clinicians

Applying Somatic Wisdom in Practice (*Optional Bonus Session*)

For therapists, healers, and helping professionals, this session offers ways to integrate the course’s teachings into your own practice and client work—while also tending to your own body’s needs.

You’ll explore:

- How to embody these tools to reduce burnout and increase presence
- Ways to guide clients in safely tracking and working with the somatic expressions of sensations
- Reflections on trauma healing through the lens of the somatically sensing

- Space to connect with peers and ask integration questions
The body is not in the way of healing—it is the way.
- This course invites you to return to and feel relaxed and open presence where deep healing begins

Your teacher:

Jill Satterfield has been a quiet pioneer in the integration of embodied awareness practices and Buddhist teachings for over 35 years.

Her heart/mind and body approach developed from somatic and contemplative psychology, 37 years of Buddhist study, extensive meditation retreat time and decades of living with chronic pain.

At the invitation of her primary teacher, Ajahn Amaro, Jill was the first to offer mindful movement and somatic practices on silent retreats first at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and then the Insight Meditation Society 30 years ago. She has since developed teacher trainings and mentoring programs that integrate embodied awareness with Dharma ever since.

In addition to teaching embodiment and Dharma with Ajahn Amaro, she was also invited to teach on Tsoknyi Rinpoche's retreats in the US and Nepal. It was at his urging that she teach subtle body practices to his students. She contributed movement and subtle body practices to his brother Mingyur Rinpoche's retreats and was a consultant for his 2 best-selling books.

Jill's Applied Embodied Mindfulness Trainings were part of UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center. She was on the faculty for Spirit Rock's Mindful Yoga and Meditation Training, was a mentor for Jack Kornfield and Tara Brach's Mindfulness Teacher Training, the scholar and teacher in residence at Kripalu Center in 2003 and is a graduate of the Sati Center's Buddhist Chaplaincy Training.

Her organization School for Compassionate Action was a training and service organization that taught mindfulness and somatic practices for chronic pain, illness and post 9/11 trauma in NYC hospitals and at-risk facilities for over ten years.

She has been featured in and has written for numerous publications such as Tricycle, Lion's Roar (who named her one of the 4 leading mindful movement teachers in the country) and the NY Times. She contributed to the book "Freeing the Body: Freeing the Mind" by Michael Stone.

Course Logistics

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